

Informant:	LMP-S1	Spanish
Date:	9-23-00	Audio-DAT
Interviewers:	C. Hernandez, M. Jones, P. Polk	
Transcriber:	?	

S1: Would you mind closing the door?

S1: What is this for?

C: To record.

S1: Would you guys like a chair?

C: Ok. We wanted to start by asking you your name and where you are from.

S1: My name is Carlos Arana Figueroa Martinez. I'm from Guatemala. I was born in November 8th, 1959. I'm from a village called Zamayac Sochiltepeques. I come from a family of many; I have an uncle whose name is Peru and another one whose name is Francisco Garcia. They are witches since birth and I am too. I started working at the age of 8. I concentrated more on telling people what would happen to them without anyone telling me anything. I lost my mother when I was 3 years old. I grew up without a mom and I've been working for a long time. Around the age of 6 I left my house to work in a grocery store (barroteria).

C: What is a barroteria?

S1: It's where they sell food and liquor in Guatemala. The owner believed a lot in San Simon and he gave me the opportunity to bring my saints. I saw that many people came to the store and as I got older I knew everything that people asked me. I always answered their questions.

C: Since you were six?

S1: Yes, I began to build an altar in the store and the man was trustful that everything would come out right. So we began taking flowers to San Simon every Tuesday and Friday and when we came back it was full of customers. I have been in Los Angeles for twelve years.

C: Twelve years here?

S1: Yes but I have not been working here for twelve years because it takes a while to adapt to a place. After two years I became adapted and I began working.

C: Then you have had this botanica for two years?

S1: For twelve years.

C: He has had this botanica for twelve years.

S1: I used to have it in 3501 Pico and Westchester and from there we came here. We've been here in this location for six years. I had another place upstairs, but I don't like it because there were many problems. Now, in this place I see at least 50 people.

C: Daily?

S1: Daily, but Tuesdays and Fridays I see around 200 people.

P: Why?

S1: They come to get cured. Some have skin problems so I give them baths and they get cured. Some had witchcraft done to them, others got the evil eye, others come with stomachaches or stress, and some come almost ready to die. Those who are dying are carried in here but once I see them they feel better. I give them baths and I also pass duck eggs, turkey eggs, rue and lemon over their bodies. Then I make the sign of the cross. A lot of people come but I mostly see those who are sick. I treat people that are having an indigestion, women who can't have children, men who can't have sex with their wives or that have back injuries, and women with fallen uterus. I can treat everything.

Some come with stains in their skin that the doctors can't do anything about. Others come with ?(giotes) that are like lumps on the skin that cause itching. It itches so much that people scratch until they bleed.

C: How do you treat these illnesses? With rituals, herbs or both?

S1: Yes, with rituals. But first they have to come to a consultation with me. I can't just take anyone without knowing what's wrong. I need to know if the disease is natural. Then I need to work with natural things, but if it's supernatural then it becomes spiritual. When a person walks in very sick; say for example that they bring *you* very sick then what I do is prepare a bath for you with holy water, rosemary, basil, rue, seven lemons cut in the shape of the cross and ?(siete machos). Then I'll do a ?(saumerio) and pass nine duck eggs on your body. Then I'll tell them to leave and throw them away. I tell them that when they get home they have to fix a white table, put a Jesus Christ, a San Simon and a white table cloth like this. Then I tell them to put a glass of water and a white candle on each side. Say that the person who is ill is lying here. On this side they need to put a new pair of metal scissors with white thread, a needle, a piece of cotton, alcohol and a couple of white roses. The bed where the sick person is lying has to be all white and covered with white sheets so that the spirits will come out. The spirits are sister Catalina, brother Rodolfo, brother Francisco and sister Catalina azucar.

C: So the saints that you mentioned need to come heal this person?

S1: They are not saints, they are curanderos but they already passed away. They come to heal the ill.

C: What are their names again?

S1: They are Fidelino Figueroa, sister Catalina, brother Rodolfo, brother Francisco, and sister Maria Luisa Sosa. They are all dead. They were very good curanderos.

C: Did you study with them?

S1: No, I did not study.

P: Were they from Nicaragua?

S1: No, from Guatemala. One of them was from San Pedro of Pocapá and the other from Zamayac Sochiltepec. Maria Luisa Sosa was from Rio San Juan, brother Francisco Garcia was from Entrada de Zamayac Mazatenango, brother Rodolfo was from Cuyotenango and sister Catalina was from Antigua.

C: The name of this botanica is botanica San Simon. Can you explain the name?

S1: The name of this botanica is Templo San Simon. I've been taking care of it for twelve years. I moved from across the street to this place because it was too small and because the owner there brought too many problems, that's why we moved here. We are from Guatemala and this botanica is very famous around the world, it's international. It's the only botanica and Templo San Simon de los Llanos that was established around 1989.

C: What does "De Los Llanos" mean?

S1: San Simon de los Llanos says: (prayer)..because I know that you are in the plains (llanos) forests, cities, fields, villages and houses. Therefore I named it "De Los Llanos".

C: The plains represents a place, so it's not a specific place? Can it be any place?

S1: No, it's not a place. Llano is like a field- a field with grass on it.

C: Is llano like a stadium?

S1: You can call it llano because that's what it said on the prayer or maybe because that was the name of the village.

C: You said you call it llano of the village?

S1: It's like a village or a casarillo. Casarillo is like a neighborhood.

P: Is it spiritual?

S1: Yes, it's spiritual.

C: Then the llano is a reference to a spiritual place?

S1: Yes.

C: So, is the llano a spiritual place because it has herbs?

S1: The prayer says, “because you are in the mountains, hills, fields, houses, and cities-Los Angeles. So llanos encompasses all this.

C: Why do you prefer San Simon and not San Martin?

S1: I call San Simon because he is the one who gave me this job. God is above him because San Simon says, “if my father wants it everything will come out fine”. It’s as if he was my boss.

P: How did you meet San Simon? Is there a specific reason?

S1: No, he just came.

Cal: Since you were six, right?

S1: Yes and when I came here to the U.S. somebody in that blue building, where I used to live told me,” I’m bringing you something”. I asked what it was. He brought a San Simon statue. He said he would bring me something that would make me a millionaire. So I asked if he was going to bring me a piece of gold. He laughed and said no. He said, “I brought you something that will be good for you”. He gave it to me. Someone had thrown it away with seven red candles, a cigar, cigarettes, with perfumes and powders. He picked it up from the street and brought it to me as if someone would have told him, “take it to Carlos”. And that’s how I have it. Ever since I was in Guatemala I knew about him, but here in the U.S. is where I got this statue.

C: Did San Simon choose you since you were very young?

S1: Yes. I do not work concentrated anymore. To work concentrated is like a medium, a person who is asleep and can tell you what will happen. You need two people to do that. So since there is no one to receive me, I could go crazy.

C: What do you mean by “someone to receive you”?

S1: It means that if a spirit comes down, you have to answer me and if you don’t he goes crazy and starts hitting everyone.

C: So I would have to answer, right?

S1: Yes, you would have to say,”Who is this? Who do you want to talk to? What is your name? What can I help you with? Do you need water?

C: Does that mean you need some one who knows how to help you and how to answer you?

S1: Yes. For example, let’s say you are my daughter and I’m working. Then I tell you that you are going to receive me. When I come here I’ll pray and I’ll ask the spirits to come. Then you put a glass of water here and pray for me and then the spirit will come and he’ll tell you everything.

C: And if you don't have someone to help you?

S1: One can die.

C: So you don't have anyone to help you at this moment like that?

S1: No, I don't work like that anymore because sometimes there is someone but sometimes there isn't. Now I work with the beans, the cards, with the scissors, mentally, and with water.

P: But who is San Simon?

S1: He is a spirit that appeared in Guatemala. Supposedly he is white like them, because in Guatemala there was no one with that name. That was years ago. A very rich man that was just like them arrived to that village. He came from Italy and when he arrived, he chose a place where the poor lived and this place was called Sunil. They say he came especially to Guatemala on a small airplane. He became very famous because he would give out medicine, money, vaccines and he would protect people. When he came he brought trucks of medicine, food, and other things. Then he became famous and everyone liked him, but those people who envied him wanted to kill him. They would say that he was not a doctor but a witch. They persecuted him, they didn't let him work and prohibited him to give anything to people. But many people liked him because he would give them medicine and food. Since they wanted to kill him, the Indians would protect him. So one day around 5:00pm, they took him to Guatemala so he would leave. They put him on a horse. He was wearing a red handkerchief and his hat, like an indigenous person. He wandered around and then he went to the capital. Some people were taking care of him. He was going to Guatemala because he had to take the airplane there to go back to his country. Throughout his journey, he was not San Simon yet, but a white man. Then since it was too far away from where he was going, he passed by a place called San Andres Exzapa at around four a.m. It was not a town at that time, it was like a mountain and there was only one little old house. He knocked at the door and an old man came out. The old man welcomed him and told him to go in. He told him, "come in, this is your house". He thanked him but he only wanted to know how far it was from there to Guatemala city. The man told him that he still needed six more hours. He told the old man that he needed to catch the airplane before sunrise. The old man told him, "it is better to lose a minute than to lose your life in one minute". He told the old man that he had to leave because it was already four in the morning. You could see the moon very clearly. He was about to hop on his horse but the old man took him inside and gave him a cup of coffee so that he would feel warmer. As he was giving him coffee he told him again that it is better to lose a minute than to lose your life in one minute. The white man sat down on a rock and after he drank his coffee, he wasn't himself anymore. The old man was San Simon. The white man disappeared and he never made it to Guatemala.

C: Than he was an old man?

S1: No, he was a white man. The old man was there and the white man passed by there and he was converted. That is why the Iglesia de San Simon is there.

C: What is the name of the town?

S1: The name is San Andres Exzapa. There is another one in Sunil. There are many in different parts of Guatemala, but the two original places are Sunil and San Andres Exzapa. This one is the third temple. It's a replica of the main temple. It's almost the same. The only difference is that one cannot have burnings here because the laws are different. Even if one wanted to, we can't.

C: Why are some San Simons different colors?

S1: Red San Simon is for love, black San Simon is for all the people and the green and light blue is for money.

P: Is that new or has it always been like that?

S1: People have made it that way. It is people's faith. San Simon is normal. He normally dresses in black. He does not have an outfit but people have changed his outfit because they want him to resemble more money or love. So it is according to that that they give him color.

C: Then people have given him the outfits?

S1: Every year they give him a beige, black or white outfit. If I want I can dress him in red or yellow.

C: So it depends on what you want?

S1: Yes, he does not choose or ask; you just give him.

P: Does the spirit of San Simon come into people?

C: He was telling me earlier that he used to receive San Simon but now he doesn't because he doesn't have anyone to assist him in order to respond to him. For example when the spirit enters him and the it says, "ask something" and....

S1: And the voice changes, the voice has to change because sometimes it's a man that comes down and sometimes it's a woman.

C: When that happens the other person has to receive that spirit. He has to be able to answer whatever questions can assist him. If that spirit wants water, you have to give him water. You have to be able to meet those needs. He doesn't have anyone at this time to do that- not anyone dependable at least. So he doesn't do it anymore.

C: Are you training anyone to assist you in receiving spirits?

S1: No, I can't train anyone because what I know, I already know and since I can't read or write the beans, the cards and the scissors tell me everything. If you wanted to be a witch I can't teach you. I can't lie, there are many places that do it but there are very few

that really know what they are doing. It is not for envy, but I simply can't do something like that.

C: Is it because you don't have the authorization to do it?

S1: I can't because San Simon does not allow it. People are born knowing what they are going to do.

J: Did he say he doesn't read or write?

C: Did you say you can't read or write?

S1: I have tried but I can't.

P: The Duende?

S1: The duende is a saint that lives everywhere in the world. He is brother Diego. He has many names. They call him el Sombreron and Zipitio in El Salvador. He has a lot of money. If you give him gold he'll give you more or if you ask him to help in your bussines he will help you. He is like a little guy that likes to follow. If he likes you he will follow you around and braid your hair so tight that you can't undo the braid unless you shave your hair off. But if you shave it he will be so mad that he will kill you. He doesn't do anything bad, if he likes you he just wants to be with you as a friend.

C: Is it for luck?

S1: For luck, for healing, for many things. He is everywhere; for example Beverly Hills and Malibu. He appears where there are many rocks, mountains and caves. There are people who go looking for him in the caves but they don't really know where to find him because he has backward feet. When he is going in to a cave, his feet are pointing out as if he were leaving, and when he is going out, his feet are pointing in as if he were coming in. He confuses people. San Simon and the duende are live spirits.

P: Is San Simon a Catholic saint?

S1: For what we believe, yes, but the church does not accept him because he is wearing pants. When people go see him, they see him as a Catholic saint.

C: Why does it matter that he is wearing pants?

S1: The church just discriminates like that. He appeared on October 28th, and that same day, Saint Judas Tadeus also appeared. Saint Judas Tadeus is in the Catholic Church. People say that San Simon and San Judas Tadeo are brothers.

P: Can you explain what is going to happen the 22nd on the San Simon festival?

S1: We pray and since we can't walk him a lot and do a whole procession, we'll walk him for 3 or 4 blocks.

C: What time will you be walking him?

S1: Around eleven or noon. Then we bring him here where everyone receives him. They all start singing to him. He likes a song called “El Rey de Mil Coronas” or The King of a Thousand Crowns and he also likes the marimba and the guitar. We have a kids contest where somebody comes and teaches the kids about San Simon and who he was. The kids color a drawing and they have a contest to see who draws the best representation of San Simon and they win a price.

C: Who teaches this class?

S1: He is the boss of the ?(cofradilla). His name is Oscar.

C: What is cofradilla?

S1: A cofradilla is where the saint is kept. You never take use the original statue, you only take out the replica of the saint.

P: What is the name of the cofradilla?

S1: It does not have a particular name. It’s just the cofradilla of San Simon and Oscar.

C: Is it associated with this temple?

S1: It’s not an association. It’s community oriented. People come if they want to help or work with it. Oscar makes fundraisers so that they can help for the expenses in these kinds of festivals.

P: Just Guatemalans?

S1: Most are Guatemalans, but some are Hondurenos, Nicaraguenses, and people from all over. There are no white people. A lot of tourists come from Italy, France, Denmark, England and Russia to take pictures. There are not really any Asian people around. They don’t come here because they don’t believe in this, they believe in something else.

P: Do you have consultations that day?

S1: Yes, here in this room. I try to only see people for half a day because there are a lot people who come that day. After consultations we have a dance called “Baile de la Bara” that enables people to ask San Simon for protection.

C: Is that the dance that people have to perform if they want to ask him for something?

S1: Yes, I dance it first and then I pass it on. They only dance it once.

P: At what time do you do this dance?

S1: At around four in the afternoon.

P: Can people record it?

S1: Yes. Sometimes channel 34 comes. There's food and beer for everyone because he likes drinking. Around eleven everyone is drunk and no one is filming anymore. We have security guards because everyone is drinking and we don't want anyone to get out of hand. From nine to twelve, we have a show of mimicking celebrities. We have Ricky Martin, Charlie Zaa, Talia, Laura Leon and others. We have a group of Brazilian dancers which make it very amusing for women and children. Everyone sits down and watches the show. It is very decent. The 28th, people come pray and celebrate here because that's his day. I do it before on the 22nd because sometimes the shop owners don't give us permission to do it on that day.

C: Do people come celebrate here on the 28th?

S1: Yes, but only in here?

P: Does the Catholic Church have ceremonies for San Simon?

S1: No. In Guatemala there is a church that does this in Chichicaztenango. They do witchcraft inside the church.

C: Are people in Guatemala bothered by the word witchcraft? I find that people in this country get mad if I call them witch or curandero. They don't like being associated with either of the two. How do you define the word witch and the word curandero?

S1: They say that witch is someone who kills and that curandero is the one who heals. Spiritist is the one who works with the spirits. They think witch refers to something evil therefore they get mad.

C: Are you an spiritist?

S1: I am spiritist and curandero.

C: Earlier you said you were a witch. How can you explain that?

S1: I said witch because that's how people call me. In the place where I come from they say there is a good man who can cure you. People use witch to insult a person. Some say that a good man or a good woman live in certain places. Others say the good man or the good woman is a witch.

C: He (Dr.) has to leave right now. When would it be a good time to visit you at home?

S1: A Sunday would be good for me.

C: Can we come next Sunday?

S1: Can you call me before you come?

C: Do you want us to call you a few days before Saturday or Sunday?

S1: Call me Sunday and if you want, write a book on San Simon. I know a lot of things about him. But do it because if you say you will and then you don't...

C: We are going to do it.

S1: I can do waters; I can do many things. I sold a product to a company. If you are interested in writing a book, it can be very profitable. You can also write it in English because there are many people who want to know about this.

P: Yes we are interested in writing this book, but to write a book we would need to ask you many more questions just like the ones we were asking you right now.

S1: Do you want to make the book to sell it or just to have it? I don't know what your intentions are.

P: We are not looking to make a business from the book but rather use it as information. That way by keeping it we can have access to the information, but we are willing to assist you to write a book that can be sold. Not only one but different books. You must know that this is a very long project. In order for us to better understand how you consult people, is it possible for you to consult or see one of us? Can we videotape the interviews? This is for school use.

S1: Okay.

C: We are going to have a lot of questions for you, hopefully you will not get tired. We are going to ask you how this works, what this, etc. We for example will be asking you what this painting is about.

S1: All this is spiritual and I like it and it brings me energy. The moon, the sun and the antiques bring energy.

C: These are the types of questions we are going to be asking you.

S1: Okay.